DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 090 461 CG 008 852

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TITLE Attribution of Sex-Role Characteristics: An Idiosyncratic Process.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 13p.; Presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (Chicago, Illinois, April, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; *Individual Characteristics; Individual Development; Interaction; Personality Assessment; *Role Perception; *Sex Differences; *Socialization; Speeches; *Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

The existing research in the area of sex-role stereotypes has emphasized the presence of clearly delineated and relatively rigid roles. However, since each personality trait can be found in varying amounts in both of the sexes, one might think that the current norms of sex-role stereotypes are unduly limited. In the socialization process, all individuals must learn to handle themselves in a variety of situations, i.e., all must learn to be assertive, dependent, compassionate, etc. The exact behavior which emerges may vary depending upon factors such as the current social milieu or the method by which an individual has been taught to express these emotions. (Author)

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ATTRIBUTION OF SEX-ROLE CHARACTERISTICS: AN IDIOSYNCRATIC PROCESS

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In its broadest sense attribution is the process by which an individual ascribes a certain characteristic or group of characteristics to an external event or object. In this way we attempt both to know the environment in which we live and to validate our judgments concerning it. A major question in the realm of attribution theory is whether or not perceptions are based upon the actual properties of an entity or upon the characteristics of the observer; or upon some interaction between the two. In simplified terms the choice is between external attribution or internal (self) attribution. This may be illustrated by an example where a judgment could be the result of either the inherent qualities of the event or the idiosyncratic response of the observer. Is my favorable response to a ballet due to the brilliance of the performance or to the fact that I have secret dreams of being a "prima ballerina?" In other words is the judgment of "enjoyable" to be attributed to the external (the ballet) or to the internal (self)?

This same phenomena can be found in the attribution of personality traits. Certain groups of people can be easily identified because of unique characteristics; for example, blacks, the exceptionally tall or short, women, redheads, etc. The process of describing the members of such distinct groups with a common set of adjectives is well known as stereotyping and, of course, the complex of traits assigned to any particular group is labeled "stereotype." Stereotypes come in many

forms and varieties. We have specific perceptions of what "rich men, poor men, beggar men, thieves, doctors, lawyers, and merchant chiefs" are like.

As implied by the title, this paper is concerned with the stereotypes of sex-role behavior. The existing research in the area of sex-role stereotypes has emphasized the presense of clearly delineated and relatively rigid categories. However, since each personality trait can be found in varying amounts in individuals of both sexes, one might be lead to think that the current stereotypic norms are unduly limited. In the socialization process all individuals must learn to handle themselves in a variety of situations, i.e., all must learn to be assertive, dependent, or compassionate. The exact behavior which emerges may vary depending upon factors such as the current social milieu or the method by which an individual has been taught to express these emotions. It might be that stereotypic dimensions are far less rigid than currently assumed. Perhaps, rather than being bound by an existing stereotype, people tend to view each other idiosyncratically and to base judgments on their own reactions rather than on existing norms of appropriate behavior.

Here then, in the realm of attribution of sex-role stereotypes, we face again the choice between external attribution or internal (self) attribution. Is my judgment of an individual based upon socially defined stereotypes (external attribution) or upon my own personal reaction (internal attribution)? By labeling stereotypes as external attribution and personal reaction as internal attribution I am, of course,

using a perhaps overly simplified model. In actuality the distinction is not so clearcut. The individual does incorporate the values of society and in turn influences and modifies the existing mores. It is an interaction process. However, since a stereotype is to a certain extent held in common by members of a specific population, it can be viewed as an external entity with a definite existence of its own. It is in this sense that I regard the use of stereotypes as external attribution. The point to be made in this paper is not that we are uninfluenced by external standards, but rather that we do respond in a complex and diverse manner. An individual makes judgments about another individual based upon personal responses peculiar to that person and that situation. Judgments are not made merely upon the basis of pre-existing stereotypes. It is to highlight the importance of the idiosyncratic individual response that I make the arbitrary distinction in the process of the attribution of sex-role stereotypes between stereotyping (external attribution) and idiosyncratic response (internal attribution). Through the use of this simplified model, we might be able to gain a somewhat better understanding of interactions between individuals.

Now that a dichotomy has been suggested let us look at the research in the area to determine whether attribution of sex-role stereotypes is an external or an internal process. One feasible approach would be to make a comparison between Kelley's (1967) criteria for determining attribution source and traditional sex-role theory. However, it should be noted beforehand that research in the area of sex-role

development has tended to regard external attribution (stereotyping) as the sole process. Consequently, the evidence that I mention in the following section will be somewhat skewed in that direction, and it is only subsequently that I shall offer an alternative hypothesis.

Kelley's (1967) four criteria for determining external attribution are as follows.

1) A differential response. Do we tend to respond in a different manner to the group-women than to the group-men?

2) A consistent response over time. Do we tend to respond consistently at varying periods of time to a particular group?

3) A consistent response over modality. Do we tend to respond consistently in differing situations?

4) Consensus. Do all participants agree as to the characteristics of a particular group?

There is ample evidence in our society that we tend to respond to the group-women in a different way than we do to the group-men. When we look at the stereotypes of femininity in our culture we find women described as: talkative, tactful, gentle, religious, neat, quiet, dependent, illogical, and emotional. Men, in contrast, are described as: aggressive, independent, objective, dominant, active, logical, adventurous, ambitious, and self-confident (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz & Vogel, 1970). Based upon these stereotypes we do indeed act differently toward men as a whole than we do toward women. In general, we are more protective and less demanding of women. Bronfenbrenner (1961) sums up this attitude when he states that the aim

of socialization is twofold: to teach males to make an impact on the environment and to protect women from any ill effects of that same environment.

In addition, this differential response tends to be consistent over time and modality. From the moment that we put pink booties on girl babies and blue booties on boy babies and continuing throughout the developmental process, we tend to respond in a distinct manner to the group-men and to the group-women. There is general consensus as to the stereotypes and appropriate behavior for each group in a specific culture. Groups as diverse as clinical psychologists and undergraduate students, when asked to describe socially competent men or women, agree on the divergent characteristics of each sex.

In spite of the above, which might be regarded as overwhelming evidence for the attribution of personality characteristics as an external process, strongly influenced by existing stereotypes, I would like to offer an alternative hypothesis, namely that attribution is an idiosyncratic process, based upon the self rather than the other. Stated simply, an individual does not interact with a group, but with another individual and judges that person accordingly.

I make this suggestion based upon both an historical perspective and evidence from research. Let me first go into the historical evidence before I talk specifically about the research. To put the matter quite bluntly, we psychologists have perpetuated a fraud upon our fellow scientists and particularly upon the American society. We have been the proponents of an "either-or" philosophy; i.e., either one is dependent or independent, passive or aggressive, logical or illogical,

and so forth. Only rarely is the whole continuum of the human personality taken into consideration. In short, we have tended to look at a multi-dimensional world through bipolar glasses. This limited and rigid view of the human personality was partly the result of inadequate statistical techniques and partly the result of petty thinking. The effects of this philosophy have been far ranging, but let us deal in this paper specifically with sex-role characteristics. Here we have a ready made bipolar situation; female and male. Experiments have been designed to highlight the differences between the sexes, rather than to focus on the individual. Undergraduate students have been given forced-choice questions ("Is basket-weaving more feminine or masculine?"); have been asked to list behaviors, attitudes, and personality characteristics that they felt differentiated between men and women; and have been required to define their ideal woman or man. The result has been two sets of characteristics which comprise the definitions of femaleness and maleness. If researchers went looking for stereotypes, they were bound to find them. Fortunately, methods and viewpoints change and the current researcher is obligated to look at familar situations from a new perspective.

Influenced by the results of earlier pilot work at the University of Florida, I am engaged in an ongoing research program which attempts to look at personality characteristics without assuming a stereotypic bias. Further, since much of the previous work in this area had relied on paper and pencil descriptions, the present experiment was designed to look at individual reactions to samples of actual behaviors. Although only a preliminary analysis of the work has been done, I believe that the results offer tentative support for the hypothesis that attribution of personality traits

is in part an idiosyncratic process rather than solely a stereotypic process.

The investigation used 2 experimenters, 8 actors, and 256 film observers. The experimenters, 1 female and 1 male, were the researcher and her assistant. The actors, 4 men and 4 women, were students in an advanced psychology course who volunteered for the project. The film observers, 128 males and 128 females, were introductory psychology students who were meeting part of a course requirement for research participation.

Video-tapes were made of each of the actors. Each person read the "Rainbow Passage," chosen because it contains all of the phonetic sounds in the English language.

> "When the sunlight strikes raindrops in the air, they act like a prism and form a rainbow. The rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. These take the shape of a long round arch, with its path high above, and its two ends apparently beyond the horizon. There is, according to legend, a boiling pot of gold at one end. People look, but no one ever finds it. When a man looks for something beyond his reach, his friends say he is looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

Each actor was given two practice sessions and was requested to sit at a table facing the video-tape machine. No retakes were necessary.

The eight video-tapes were put together in eight random orders. Each sequence was shown to 32 Ss, half female and half male. Immediately after viewing each film segment, each S was asked to rate that individual actor on a Stereotype Questionnaire (Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman & Broverman, 1968) which consisted of 82 bipolar items rated on a 7 point scale. Each S filled in a questionnaire on each

one of the readers.

A factor analysis was run on the judgments of the 256 Ss. Since each S rated each of the 8 film segments, a total of 2048 ratings on each of the 82 bipolar items was possible. The analysis, which included a principle componet extraction with a varimax rotation, resulted in five factors accounting for 84% of the total possible communality. Scales with loadings greater than .4 were used to define the factor. Eigenvalues for the five factors and the scales constituting each are shown in Table 1. The first column contains the descriptive terms given the factors.

Factor I seemed to correspond most readily to a dimension of "active-passive." Factor II was more heavily loaded on traits of kindness and affection and appeared best defined as "warm-cold." Factor III appeared to tap traits of emotionality and was labeled "emotional-unemotional." Factor IV with only three loadings appeared clearly to be a measure of the dimension "intelligent-unintelligent." Factor V, which contained all the items which related to sex, can be easily described as "masculine-feminine."

Although a further analysis would reveal specific interaction effects, the data shown here are highly relevant to the central theme of this paper. From the principal components analysis described in Table 1, we may conclude that the impressions of the actors are largely structured in terms of five dimensions: "active-passive," "warm-cold," "emotional-unemotional," "intelligent-unintelligent," and "masculine-feminine." This finding runs counter to that of much previous research

which found only two dimensions and arbitrarily labeled one "masculine" and the other "feminine." Instead we have found that the aspect of "masculine-feminine" is an important consideration when we judge the personality characteristics of other individuals, but it is only one of at least five dimensions which are taken into consideration. The judgment of an individual on a "masculine-feminine" continuum does not necessarily imply a certain set of judgments on other dimensions. Reactions are independent and specific to an individual.

This evidence, coupled with that mentioned previously, lends support for the conclusion that attribution of personality traits includes the idiosyncratic response of the individual. Attribution is not based exclusively on external stereotypes. Instead the interaction between individuals has many components. We are influenced by existing mores. We are influenced by the current stereotypic norms. However, we are also influenced by the specific characteristics of an individual. All of these form the basis for a unique response to each individual with whom we interact. Attribution can thus be seen as both an internal and external process. It is a complex response to a multi-dimensional situation and to limit it to a mindless reaction based upon preexisting stereotypes is to demean the limitless capacity of the human personality.

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TABLE 1

FACTOR STRUCTURE OF EXPERIMENTER RATINGS

FACTOR	SCALE	LOADING
I: Active-Passive	Very shy-Very outgoing	.85
	Never leader-Always leader	.83
	Retiring-Forward	.82
	Very quiet-Very loud	.79
	Not at all self confident-Very self confident	.77
	Not at all competitive-Very competitive	.75
	Very weak personality-Very strong personality	.73
	Not at all talkative-Very talkative	.67
	Not ambitious-Very ambitious	.66
	Not at all adventurous-Very adventurous	.60
	Not at all aggressive-Very aggressive	.60
	Gives up easily-Never gives up easily	.54
	Not at all independent-Very independent	.51
	Very good sense of humor-Very poor sense of humor	-.43
	Very impulsive-Not at all impulsive	-.44
	Very little need for security-Very strong need for security	-.47
	Seeks new experiences-Avoids new experiences	-.48
	Not at all dependent-Very dependent	-.50
	Makes decisions easily-Has difficulty making decisions	-.54
	Very conceited about appearance-Never conceited about appearance	-.60
	Very sociable-Not at all sociable	-.60
	Not at all uncomfortable about being aggressive-Very uncomfortable about being aggressive	-.64
	Very dominant-Very submissive	-.73
	Very active-Very passive	-.78
	Feels very superior-Feels very inferior	-.78
	Very assertive-Not at all assertive	-.80
	Always sees self as running the show-Never sees self as running the show	-.81

TABLE I

FACTOR STRUCTURE OF EXPERIMENTER RATINGS

FACTOR	SCALE	LOADING
II: Warm-Cold	Very helpful to others-Not at all helpful to other	.76
	Very aware of feelings of others-Not at all aware of feelings of others	.74
	Very grateful-Very ungrateful	.73
	Very warm in relations with others-Very cold in relations with others	.71
	Very affectionate-Not at all affectionate	.69
	Easily expresses tender feelings-Does not express tender feelings easily	.67
	Very gentle-Very rough	.56
	Very neat in habits-Very sloppy in habits	.49
	Very good sense of humor-Very poor sense of humor	.43
	Does not enjoy art & literature-Does enjoy art & literature	-.49
	Very blunt-Very tactful	-.51
	Not at all able to devote self completely to others- Able to devote self completely to others	-.67
	Not at all understanding of others-Very understanding of others	-.75
III: Emotional-Unemotional	Very emotional-Not at all emotional	.70
	Not at all consistent-Very consistent	.64
	Does not hide emotions-Always hides emotions	.62
	Very irrational-Very rational	.48
	Not at all easily influenced-Very easily influenced	-.41
	Very direct-Very sneaky	-.42
	Not at all idealistic-Very idealistic	-.49
	Able to separate feelings from ideas-Unable to separate feelings from ideas	-.49
	Very logical-Very illogical	-.50
	Always thinks before acting-Never thinks before acting	-.52
	Very practical-Very impractical	-.61
	Very realistic-Not at all realistic	-.66
	Not at all excitable in major crisis-Very excitable in major crisis	-.70
	Not at all excitable in minor crisis-Very excitable in minor crisis	-.73

TABLE I

FACTOR STRUCTURE OF EXPERIMENTER RATINGS

FACTOR	SCALE	LOADING
IV: Intelligent-Unintelligent	Doesn't care about being in a group- Prefers being in a group	.51
	Not at all intellectual-Very intellectual	.74
	Not at all intelligent-Very intelligent	-.75
V: Masculine-Feminine	Very feminine-Not very feminine	.79
	Not at all interested in appearance-Very interested in appearance	-.43
	Never cries-Cries very easily	-.52
	Thinks men are superior to women-Does not think men are superior to women	-.63
	Very masculine-Not very masculine	-.75

NOTE: The eigenvalues for Factors I-V are 14.91, 8.36, 7.06, 4.56, & 4.13, respectively.